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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL CONCERNING THE SITUATION IN ABKHAZIA, GEORGIA

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is submitted in pursuance of resolution 1096 (1997) of 30 January 1997, in which the Security Council decided to extend the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) for a new period, terminating on 31 July 1997. By the same resolution, I was requested to continue to keep the Council regularly informed, to report after three months on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, including on the operations of UNOMIG, and to provide recommendations in that report on the nature of the United Nations presence. In compliance with that request, I submitted a report to the Security Council on 25 April 1997 (S/1997/340). The present report provides an update of the situation as at 10 July 1997 and contains recommendations regarding the peacemaking process and the role of the United Nations.

II. POLITICAL ASPECTS

2. Key issues of the Georgian/Abkhaz peace process, such as the future political status of Abkhazia and the return of refugees and internally displaced persons, remain unresolved. However, during the reporting period vigorous efforts were made by the United Nations, the Russian Federation, in its capacity as facilitator, the group of Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to revitalize the peace process.

3. As I indicated in my report of 25 April 1997 (see S/1997/340, para. 39), I appointed Mr. Liviu Bota as my resident Special Representative for Georgia with effect from 1 July 1997. Mr. Bota, who succeeds Ambassador Edouard Brunner, my former Special Envoy, will be based in Tbilisi and Sukhumi and will continue to serve as Head of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG).

4. In a number of statements since my last report, the Government of Georgia and the Abkhaz authorities have reaffirmed their commitment to resolving the conflict by political means and have expressed support for a more active role for the United Nations in the peace process. A similar position was expressed by the Russian Federation during my visit to Moscow in mid-May 1997.

President Boris Yeltsin reconfirmed this position at the G-8 meeting at Denver, Colorado, the following month by supporting an enhanced role for the United Nations in the settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia. In particular, the two parties to the conflict, the five Governments members of Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia and the OSCE support my initiative to convene a high-level meeting on the conflict, to map out the areas where concrete political progress could be made, particularly in practical matters. The meeting will now take place at Geneva from 23 to 25 July 1997, under the chairmanship of my Special Representative for Georgia, with the participation of the two parties to the conflict, the Russian Federation as facilitator, the OSCE, and representatives of the States belonging to the Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia.

5. In early May 1997, a delegation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, headed by Ambassador Gennadi Ilitchev, visited Sukhumi and met with the Abkhaz leaders. In June, the Russian Federation hosted intensive Georgian-Abkhaz consultations in Moscow on a draft document prepared by the Russian facilitators and entitled "Protocol on a Georgian-Abkhaz settlement", which contains basic principles for a peaceful settlement of the conflict. The Georgian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Irakli Menagarashvili, and the Abkhaz leader, Mr. Vladislav Ardzinba, took part in the consultations. The delegations left Moscow on 20 June 1997 without reaching an agreement on the text of the Protocol, though some rapprochement between the positions of the two parties was reported. Further unofficial contacts and discussions on the issue continued afterwards. In early July, the Deputy Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, Mr. Boris Berezovsky, visited Tbilisi and Sukhumi twice and had discussions with the Government of Georgia and the Abkhaz authorities in another attempt to move the peace process forward. Mr. Berezovsky paid his second visit to Sukhumi jointly with the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, Mr. Zurab Zhvania, and the Special Representation of the President of Georgia to the Peace Process, Ambassador Vazha Lordkipanidze.

6. The Abkhaz side proposed that the two sides to the conflict should conclude a treaty providing for renunciation of the use of force. The Georgian side did not see the need for such a treaty, since the commitment of the two parties to solve all existing problems peacefully had already been included in documents signed earlier.

7. In his address to Parliament on 27 May 1997, the President of Georgia, Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze, suggested convening an international conference on Abkhazia, Georgia, under United Nations auspices. According to the President, the conference could be organized and hosted by the Russian Federation and attended by the parties to the conflict, the United Nations, OSCE, the Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia and possibly other interested Governments. Representatives of the North Caucasian republics of the Russian Federation could be given observer status.

8. President Shevardnadze and other Georgian leaders stated on a number of occasions that the presence of the peacekeeping force of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in the conflict zone would not be possible after the expiry of the force's mandate on 31 July 1997, unless the decisions of the CIS summit meeting of 28 March 1997 on the expansion of the security zone and the

repatriation of the refugees and internally displaced persons were implemented. The above position was supported by the Georgian parliament in a resolution on a further presence of the Russian armed forces under the aegis of CIS in the conflict zone in Abkhazia, adopted on 30 May 1997. The Georgian leaders emphasized, however, that even if the CIS peacekeeping force were to be withdrawn, the Georgian side would not resume hostilities. On 23 June, the Russian State Duma adopted a resolution in which, inter alia, it requested the President of the Russian Federation to undertake efforts to secure the presence of the CIS peacekeeping force in the conflict zone in Abkhazia, Georgia, beyond the expiry of its mandate on 31 July 1997. Following the adoption of the resolution, the Secretary of the Defence Council of the Russian Federation, Mr. Youri Baturin, visited Tbilisi in early July and reportedly discussed the issue of the presence of the CIS peacekeeping force in the conflict zone with Georgian leaders.

9. During the reporting period, a number of OSCE officials visited Georgia and discussed issues relating to the conflict in Abkhazia. These included the OSCE Secretary-General, Mr. Giancarlo Aragona (during the second half of April), the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Mr. Max Van der Stoel (during the second half of June), the representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Mr. Jørgen Viggo Andersen (in mid-May), and the Vice-President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and Special Rapporteur on the situation in Abkhazia, Mr. Wojciech Lamentowicz (in late June). Mr. Andersen and Mr. Lamentowicz also visited Sukhumi. In early May, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Ms. Lenny Fisher, visited Tbilisi. Representatives of the European Union and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development visited the Inguri dam (located on the Georgian side of the ceasefire line) and the Inguri Hydroelectric Power Station (on the Abkhaz side), for the purpose of assisting the two sides with the rehabilitation of those economically important sites.

10. In mid-April 1997, the Ministries of Communication of Georgia and the Russian Federation implemented their earlier decision (see S/1997/340, para. 6) on routing all external telephone communications to and from Abkhazia through Tbilisi, instead of through the territory of the Russian Federation. The Abkhaz side objected to the move and refused to use the new telephone lines, thus leaving the population of Abkhazia without communications to the outside world. As a retaliatory measure, it considerably reduced electricity supplies to Georgia from the Inguri Hydroelectric Power Station. Despite the ensuing tensions, both sides established direct contact to discuss the issues of energy and communications. However, to date the issues remain largely unresolved.

11. There were also other initiatives during the reporting period aimed at strengthening peace, security and cooperation in the region. On 31 May 1997, representatives of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and the North Caucasian republics, regions and districts of the Russian Federation met at Kislovodsk, Russian Federation, and adopted a statement on mutual understanding, peace and inter-ethnic concord in the Caucasus. Expressing their determination to contribute to lasting peace in the region, the participants in the meeting, inter alia, condemned all forms of use of force to solve disputes between them, as well as all forms of terrorism. They supported respect for human rights and the repatriation of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes.

III. HUMANITARIAN SITUATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

12. The situation of most civilians throughout Abkhazia, Georgia, remains extremely difficult: food supplies are generally scarce, particularly for the aged; the health sector has almost completely collapsed; shelter is inadequate and schools are desperately ill-equipped and lack the most basic supplies. There have, however, been some improvements during the past three months, owing mostly to the efforts of aid agencies and, in part, because of improved weather conditions.

13. Aid agencies, in particular the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Médecins san frontières (MSF-France), have enhanced their programmes in Abkhazia during the past three months. UNHCR, in particular, initiated programmes of emergency repairs to some 30 schools; expanded its agricultural programme, distributing seeds and fertilizer to vulnerable families throughout the region; and provided shelter materials for civilians in need at Gali, as well as specialized equipment for the hospital and other health structures in southern Abkhazia. In addition to its ongoing programme, targeting especially the provision of food and assistance to medically vulnerable civilians, ICRC is in the final stages of an assessment of the situation of the population of the Kodori Valley, which remains almost completely cut off from other areas of Georgia. MSF-France, with support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), has carried out a special polio campaign for children. It has also boosted its efforts to combat tuberculosis which has spread throughout the region. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat has now placed an international staff member in its sub-office in Sukhumi to strengthen overall coordination amongst aid agencies, as well as between them and UNOMIG. A series of donor visits to the region, including by representatives from Denmark, Germany, Norway, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and the European Union, have enabled aid agencies, in particular UNHCR, to assess the situation on the ground.

14. Council members will recall that funding for certain humanitarian programmes that operated in the Zugdidi area ended on 1 April 1997 and, as a result, non-governmental organizations ceased distribution of food and medicine there (see S/1997/340, para. 14). Although internally displaced persons did not protest the cessation of such programmes, there were several small demonstrations calling for the Government to pay the monthly allowances of such persons. These payments continue to be behind schedule. Non-governmental organizations and humanitarian agencies continue to operate in the Gali region. However, owing to the mine threat and the lack of proper protection, they limit their activities to areas adjacent to the main road crossing the sector (the M-27) and seldom reach outlying regions where aid is most needed. UNOMIG has offered its services to various humanitarian agencies and, since April, it has been assisting ICRC in delivering humanitarian aid to the village of Primorsk. There have been sporadic attempts by some non-governmental organizations to initiate humanitarian programmes in the Kodori Valley.

15. There has been a noticeable increase in spontaneous returns of internally displaced persons from the Zugdidi area to the Gali district during the past three months. It is possible that some of these were connected with the spring

planting season. However, most returnees appear to be staying. Estimates indicate that up to 50,000 civilians now live in the Gali district, including areas north-west and south-east of the Gali Canal.

16. The United Nations office for the protection and promotion of human rights in Abkhazia, Georgia, has continued its work. The office opened premises in the centre of Sukhumi on 1 July 1997. These premises, which are outside the UNOMIG compound, will facilitate access by the local population to the staff of the office and to human rights publications.

17. A memorandum of understanding concerning the United Nations office for the protection and promotion of human rights was signed by the Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights and the Secretary-General of OSCE on 25 April 1997. The officer contributed by OSCE will be deployed to the office once financial arrangements have been finalized between the United Nations and OSCE.

IV. OPERATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS OBSERVER MISSION IN GEORGIA

18. UNOMIG continues to operate in the restricted weapons zones of the Zugdidi and Gali sectors and in the Kodori Valley. As previously reported (see S/1997/340, para. 18), the arrival of mine-protected and other vehicles and the resumption of the resurfacing of the main roads in the Gali sector, which is still ongoing, have proved effective. While certain areas are still considered dangerous, the observers are able to patrol throughout the sector. The number of military observers has been reduced to 116 (see annex). It will be recalled that following a thorough review of the operational requirements of UNOMIG, it was considered that a total of 106 observers should be sufficient to enable the Mission to carry out the tasks entrusted to it under resolution 937 (1994) of 21 July 1994. The strength of the Mission will continue to be reduced gradually and will reach the recommended level of 106 in November 1997.

19. On 2 May, UNOMIG reopened the team base at Adjara in the Kodori Valley. The base had been closed during the winter months and while repairs were being made to a section of the road leading to it, which had been rendered impassable by a landslide (see S/1997/340, para. 20). Road conditions continue to be the main impediment to patrolling in the area, as rain frequently causes further landslides.

20. The Commander of the CIS peacekeeping force has continued to chair the weekly quadripartite meetings which bring together the UNOMIG Chief Military Observer and representatives of the Georgian and Abkhaz police, militia, security services and local administration. These meetings were held regularly during the reporting period, except on 2 and 9 July, when the Abkhaz side did not attend to protest what it stated was the continued infiltration of Georgian armed groups into Abkhazia. During the previous two months, Abkhaz and Georgian representatives met bilaterally, following the quadripartite meetings, to discuss the exchange of prisoners and the return of bodies of those killed during the hostilities of 1993. During the reporting period, 42 bodies were repatriated to Georgia and a total of 24 Abkhaz and Georgian prisoners were exchanged.

21. It will be recalled that UNOMIG has made vigorous efforts to improve the safety of the Mission's staff, including arrangements with the CIS peacekeeping force, systematic patrolling in groups of two vehicles and round-the-clock protection of the Mission's installations and assets. Nonetheless, UNOMIG personnel and property were again the victims of acts of robbery and theft on nine occasions. The most serious incident occurred on 25 April 1997, when a military observer was robbed at gun-point in his home by two men, who were reportedly Abkhaz militia.

V. SITUATION ON THE GROUND

A. General

22. The situation in the Gali restricted weapons zone and, in particular, the security zone, has remained unstable and tense. Acts of violence, including common crime, continued to be a problem during the reporting period. Most of the mine-related incidents, which involved remote-control and pressure-sensitive mines and explosive devices, were directed against the CIS peacekeeping force and the Abkhaz militia and administration. During May 1997, four separate devices were placed in the city of Sukhumi; three were discovered and disarmed, but the fourth exploded, killing one local man. In addition to the tragic killing of 10 CIS peacekeeping soldiers by one of their comrades who subsequently killed himself, there were four incidents of attacks against the peacekeeping force and the Abkhaz militia, resulting in the death of 3 peacekeepers and 1 Abkhaz militia and injuring another eight.

23. Stability in the security and restricted weapons zones of the Gali sector continues to be severely affected by the high rate of common crime such as kidnapping, looting and armed robbery. Reportedly, a large number of armed groups in uniform have been infiltrating the Zugdidi and Gali sectors. On several occasions, the Abkhaz militia exchanged fire with such groups, resulting in five infiltrators killed and eight militia wounded.

24. The Abkhaz militia, who are poorly trained and ill-equipped, are unable to control the area. In addition, local mayors in the lower Gali region reportedly take their instructions from the leaders of the "Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia-in-exile" and refuse to cooperate with the Abkhaz authorities regarding local administration. Although the Abkhaz militia and authorities have attempted to establish posts in the lower Gali region, the situation there was considered too dangerous to do so.

25. There have been several attacks against Abkhaz citizens and militia, as well as officers of the CIS peacekeeping force. The most serious incident took place on 1 June when an armoured personnel carrier was blown up by a remote-control explosive device, killing one officer and seriously wounding another.

B. Security and restricted weapons zones

26. Both sides have generally complied with the Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces signed in Moscow on 14 May 1994 (S/1994/583 and Corr.1, annex I). UNOMIG has reported 11 violations of the Agreement by the Abkhaz side and 42 by the Georgian side. However, the vast majority of these were minor violations and did not alter the situation on the ground. The most serious violation was the presence of an Abkhaz tank in the restricted weapons zone near Ochamchira on 14 May 1997. When this presence was protested, the Abkhaz Minister of Defence insisted that the tank was outside the restricted weapons zone. The same argument was used by the Government of Georgia to deny UNOMIG access to an artillery unit south of the Inguri river, which has long been suspected of holding heavy armaments. The Head of Mission is looking closely into this matter.

C. Kodori Valley

27. The situation in the Kodori Valley has generally remained calm, with the exception of occasional increases in tension due to Abkhaz army and militia activities in the area. The Georgian police continue to operate in the area, where their presence contributes to security.

28. UNOMIG observers have continued to meet with officers of the CIS peacekeeping force and of the Abkhaz army at their checkpoints in the lower part of the Kodori Valley. They have also continued to meet with Svanetian representatives and their relationship with the local population remains excellent. The Mission attended a meeting of Svanetian, Abkhaz, Georgian and CIS peacekeeping force's representatives, which, it observed, was held in a cordial atmosphere.

D. The mine problem

29. The mine threat continues to be the most serious problem in the Gali security and restricted weapons zones. During the period under review, there were six incidents, which appeared to be targeted against the CIS peacekeeping force, the Abkhaz militia and a Russian citizen. In addition, several explosive devices were found in Sukhumi and in the Gali region and were defused by the force's personnel.

30. Until 18 June, when an explosion occurred near the Inguri main bridge, the M-27 road was considered relatively safe. UNOMIG continues to limit its vehicular movement and the observers take necessary precautions when transiting the Gali sector. Mine-protected vehicles continue to be used as escort vehicles for traffic crossing the main road and patrolling off it. The road resurfacing project mentioned in my previous report (see S/1997/340, para. 32) has again been delayed as workers are reluctant to take part in it for fear of the mines.

31. The CIS peacekeeping force has been subjected to direct attacks by the mine-layers. As a result of such attacks and in an attempt to reduce its visibility, it has limited its escorts of Abkhaz authorities and its provision

of supplies to the Abkhaz militia. In addition, it has continued to conduct primarily static checkpoint operations, although there are some instances of patrolling in the upper Gali region where the mine threat is not as significant.

32. It will be recalled that the Secretariat has for some time been awaiting a response from a Government regarding the provision of mine-detection vehicles and support personnel. That response has not been forthcoming. However, since the mine-layers do not appear to be targeting UNOMIG's personnel, it is the Chief Military Observer's assessment that the deployment of these vehicles, while important, is no longer urgent. Nonetheless, taking into consideration that the situation on the ground might change, the Secretariat will continue to pursue that option.

VI. COOPERATION BETWEEN THE UNITED NATIONS OBSERVER MISSION IN GEORGIA AND THE COLLECTIVE PEACEKEEPING FORCES OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES

33. UNOMIG continues to observe the activities of the CIS peacekeeping force and to cooperate with it. Cooperation on the ground continues as described in my report of 20 January 1997 (see S/1997/47, para. 35). Cooperation between the commanding officers has also been very good, in spite of changes in the leadership of the peacekeeping force.

34. The troops of the CIS peacekeeping force rotated in April and May 1997. The force's soldiers are now better trained, more professional and more communicative. However, owing to the mine threat, their patrolling remains limited. The newly deployed soldiers have been trying to improve their relationship with the local population, but anti-Russian sentiment remains high amongst the Georgian community in the Gali sector.

35. The force's mandate is scheduled to end on 31 July 1997. As explained in paragraph 8 above, several Georgian leaders, including President Shevardnadze, have called for the withdrawal of the force after the expiry of its mandate if the decisions taken at the CIS summit meeting of 28 March 1997 are not implemented. Although discussions on that matter have been ongoing, a final decision has yet to be taken. As a result, tension continues to increase.

VII. FINANCIAL ASPECTS

36. By its resolution 51/236 of 13 June 1997, the General Assembly appropriated an amount of $18,580,500 (gross) for UNOMIG for the period from 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998. This authorization is subject to the decision of the Security Council to extend the mandate of the Mission.

37. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of UNOMIG beyond 31 July 1997, as is recommended in paragraph 45 below, the monthly cost of maintaining the Mission until 31 January 1998 would be limited to the appropriation contained in General Assembly resolution 51/236 (equivalent to $1,548,375 per month).

38. As at 30 June 1997, unpaid assessed contributions to the UNOMIG Special Account amounted to $5.5 million. The total of outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations at that date amounted to $1.7 billion.

VIII. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS

39. The Government of Georgia continues to ensure proper coordination of donor activities with the assistance of various United Nations and other international organizations. On 30 March 1997, President Shevardnadze approved a decree establishing a Foreign Investment Advisory Council responsible for the coordination and management of all financial, technical and humanitarian assistance to the country. Since then, the Council has met regularly, approving various new initiatives in favour of the development of Georgia. The secretariat of the Council is supported by an Aid Coordination Agency, an institution of the Presidential Chancellery, which has received support from various donors, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank.

40. The economy of Georgia continues to be stable. However, the situation in the social sector remains very serious and is cause for concern for the local authorities and the donor community at large. UNDP, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank are conducting, with the Government of Georgia, separate studies on various aspects of the social situation. UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) continue to monitor the evolution of the health sector.

41. The Government, in collaboration with United Nations agencies, has completed a country strategy note, which will be circulated at the end of July 1997. The note will provide the overall framework for coordination of all international aid programmes and will include elements to direct humanitarian assistance towards emergency needs, in accordance with the recommendations of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs-led Inter-agency Task Force for Humanitarian Assistance to Newly Independent States.

42. The reconstruction programme has taken on momentum with the European Union's approval of a special contribution of 4 million European currency units (ECUs). It is expected that the new contribution will be closely coordinated with the assistance provided by UNDP and UNHCR for reconstruction activities in South Ossetia.

IX. OBSERVATIONS

43. Prospects for progress in the Georgian/Abkhaz peace process have improved. The Russian Federation's efforts to resolve the situation and my declared commitment to strengthen United Nations involvement in that process (see S/1997/47, para. 45, and S/1997/340, para. 39) have set in motion a series of initiatives by the parties to the conflict. It is encouraging that both sides have begun to show more flexibility and that, despite some public pronouncements

to the contrary, there appears to be a serious effort towards accommodation and compromise under way.

44. The forthcoming high-level meeting at Geneva with both sides is intended to set the stage for the further intensification of United Nations efforts. I shall report to the Security Council on the results of the meeting at the earliest possible opportunity in an addendum to the present report.

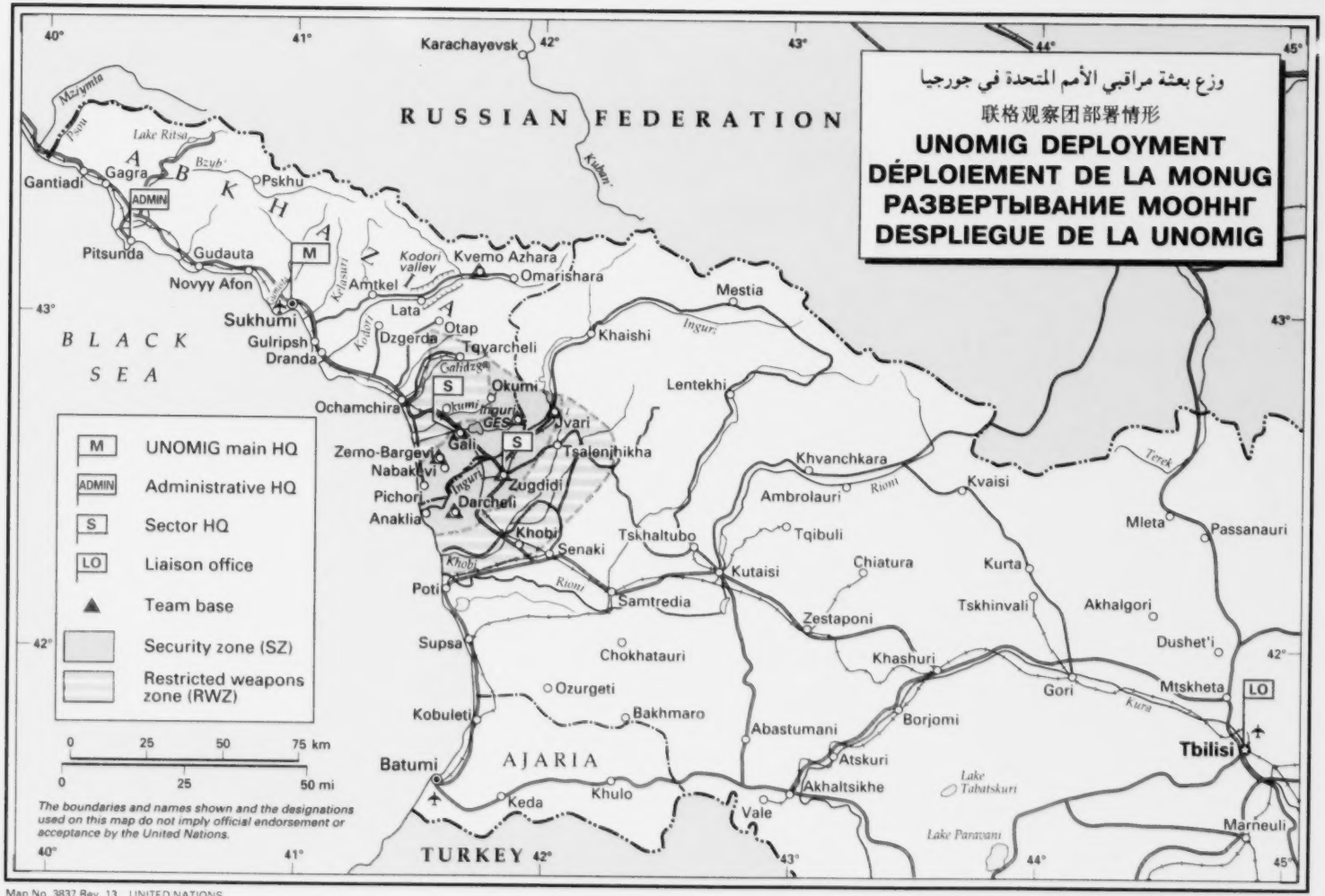
45. In the light of progress in the political process and bearing in mind the positive effects that UNOMIG continues to have on the situation, I recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of the Mission until 31 January 1998. Since, however, the mandate of the CIS peacekeeping force will expire on 31 July 1997, the extension of the mandate of UNOMIG should be subject to an early review by the Council if decisions taken by the Governments of the States that make up CIS result in changes in the mandate of that force. I shall, of course, keep the Security Council informed of developments in this regard.

46. In conclusion, I should like to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation of the dedicated work of my former Special Envoy for Georgia, Ambassador Edouard Brunner, over the past four years. I should also like to thank my Special Representative, Mr. Liviu Bota, and the Chief Military Observer, Major-General Harun Ar-Rashid, as well as all the military and civilian personnel under their command, for their continued dedication and perseverance in carrying out, under difficult conditions, the tasks entrusted to them by the Security Council.

Annex

Composition of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia as at 10 July 1997

Country	Military observers
Albania	1
Austria	4
Bangladesh	10
Cuba	4
Czech Republic	4
Denmark	3
Egypt	5
France	5
Germany	10
Greece	4
Hungary	5
Indonesia	5
Jordan	7
Pakistan	7
Poland	4
Republic of Korea	4
Russian Federation	3
Sweden	5
Switzerland	5
Turkey	5
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	8
United States of America	4
Uruguay	4
Total	116



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